Clarifying Islamic Scholarly Stances on the Bible's Textual Integrity

by

Bassam Zawadi

"The Qur'an acknowledges the textual integrity of the Bible" is a favored argument employed by Christian missionaries in their discourse against Islam. Fortunately, numerous Muslims, myself included, have previously addressed these flawed arguments; see here: Does Islam Endorse The Bible? .

The focus of this article is to dispel misconceptions surrounding the viewpoints of certain Islamic scholars, which missionaries and some academics have often misrepresented. A few of these scholars' perspectives have been misunderstood by some Muslims as well.

- Ibn Ishaq (151 A.H.)
- Ibn al-Layth (d. 204 A.H.)
- Al-Qasim b. Ibrahim (d. 246 A.H.)
- Ali b. Rabban al-Tabari (d. mid-3rd century)
- Ibn Qutaybah (d. 276 A.H.)
- Al-Ya'qubi (d. end of 3rd century)
- Ibn Jarir al-Tabari (d. 310 A.H.)
- Al-Ghazali (d. 505 A.H.)
- Fakhr ud-Din ar-Razi (606 A.H.)
- Ibn Khaldun (808 A.H.)

Ibn Ishaq (151 A.H.)

Certain missionaries have attempted to distort Ibn Ishaq's position by suggesting that his citation of a verse from the Gospel of John implies his endorsement of the New Testament's textual accuracy. However, Martin Whittingham addresses this argument by stating:

> Turning to the treatment of textual corruption in biographical literature, the Sīra of Ibn Isḥāq yields limited but notable material. The book can be understood as written for the 'Abbāsid Caliph al-Manṣūr (r.136–158/754–775) to stress the continuity of

> the Muslims (understand equally here the ‘Abbāsids) with previous prophetic history.[61] More will be said on this continuity below. Ibn Isḥāq applies the term “Paraclete” from John’s Gospel to Muhammad, an important indication for how early this claim about the meaning of Paraclete was circulating, and discussed further below. **He appears to have deliberately altered some of his Biblical quotations, so that the reports he had received were rendered more clearly in agreement with Islamic views of what the true Injīl must have said.[62]** For example, three times the phrase “my father” is altered to read “the Lord, al-Rabb” so as to eliminate the notion of Jesus as Son of God the Father**. If so, this indicates that Ibn Isḥāq, or his sources, accepted the idea that the Gospel of John needed correcting since it had strayed from the original message.** The alternative, that Ibn Isḥāq simply misquotes the gospel text, perhaps because of relying on orally transmitted reports, is less likely given the persistent pattern of de-Christianisation in his gospel quotations. It is unclear whether Ibn Isḥāq thought that once so corrected, the Bible provided basically reliable information, including about Muhammad. **So these alterations could be taken either as an indication of Ibn Isḥāq’s scepticism about the original text,** or conversely regarded more positively, as a sign that he thought it was essentially reliable if brought **into line with the truth through minor adjustments.** (Martin Whittingham, *A History of Muslim Views of the Bible*, pp. 59-60)

Ibn al-Layth (d. 204 A.H.)

Although no explicit statements from Ibn al-Layth indicate a belief in the textual corruption of previous scriptures, academics have noted significant aspects of his stance on this matter.

Martin Whittingham states:

> Ibn al-Layth may be using a collection of Biblical verses gathered for purposes of argument, rather than a complete Bible. His use of the Old Testament is more extensive than use of the New, which is much more fragmentary, drawing mainly on John’s Gospel. Some arguments occur which become standard features of Biblical proofs of Muhammad, such as the view that the Biblical Paraclete is a prediction of Muhammad, though in this passage the Biblical references to God as father and testimony to Jesus **are omitted, presumably deliberately.[11]**
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> **…**
>
> It is difficult to gauge Ibn al-Layth’s attitude to Biblical corruption. He describes the scriptures in general as preserved (maḥfūẓa). **But this could be a tactical appeal to a textual authority recognised by the Byzantine ruler, rather than an actual affirmation of the Biblical text (which, as noted above, Ibn al-Layth adjusts to fit Islamic thinking regarding the Paraclete).** He makes no explicit

> criticism of the text of the Bible, **but the significance of this remains unclear.** (Martin Whittingham, *A History of Muslim Views of the Bible*, pp. 88-89)

Ryan Schaffner says:

> It must be conceded that Ibn al-Layth clearly and explicitly states that he considers Christians to be misinterpreting their scriptures and that the books of God are preserved and guarded. His argument is consistent with that statement and he presents biblical proof-texts to support his claim that Muḥammad was foretold in the Bible as well as in support of his argument that Jesus is not the divine Son of God. **What is problematic about assuming that he only thinks the Bible has been misinterpreted is that he quotes only a small handful of verses. He does not show any awareness of the contents of the Bible beyond these passages and he was likely quoting from a *testimonia* collection that only contained biblical proof-texts Muslims could use for their apologetic/polemical purposes. Further, his altering of the verse regarding the Paraclete, in which "father" is changed to "lord" is consistent with the *Sīrah*.** Ultimately, Ibn al-Layth's *Risālah* does not provide much evidence that he considered the text of the Bible to be corrupt. Rather, *taḥrīf al-maʿnā* seems to be the extent of Ibn al-Layth's accusation against the Bible. (Ryan Schaffner, *The Bible through a Qur'ānic Filter: Scripture Falsification (Taḥrīf) in 8th- and 9th-Century Muslim Disputational Literature*, pp. 34)

While Ryan's intellectual honesty is commendable, I disagree with the logical conclusion drawn in the last sentence, which doesn't seem to follow logically from the preceding sentences. It would have been more appropriate for him to maintain a neutral stance regarding Ibn al-Layth's perspective.

Al-Qasim b. Ibrahim (d. 246 A.H.)

Ryan Schaffner's looks at al-Qasim's stance in detail and concludes:

> It has been demonstrated in this chapter that the particular manner in which al-Qāsim edits the section of Matthew he includes demonstrates more than a simple charge of misinterpretation. Apart from his explicit charge that the transmission of the Gospel is suspect in section three, it is the content and nature of al-Qāsim's treatment of the Gospel at the end of his treatise that forces a reconsideration of the manner in which his work has been understood. (Ryan Schaffner, *The Bible through a Qur'ānic Filter: Scripture Falsification (Taḥrīf) in 8th- and 9th-Century Muslim Disputational Literature*, pp. 292-293)

Ali b. Rabban al-Tabari (d. mid-3rd century)

Clint Hackenburg states:

> Still, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī's understanding of the Bible is not as uncomplicated as many scholars perceive it to be. His works more accurately present a total disrespect for Christian confession, doctrine, and exegesis. **A "total respect" for Christian scriptures would not entail amendments, acknowledgment of scriptural variants, and the censuring of Christian translators and copyists.** Moreover, when a Muslim author — irrespective of how extensively — cites biblical proof-texts for their own polemical or apologetic intentions, ***they are not endorsing the textual integrity of the Bible as a whole.*** (Clint Hackenburg, *Voices of the Converted: Christian Apostate Literature in Medieval Islam*, p. 167)

Jake Kildoo says:

> In the present evaluation, I will argue that **to characterize 'Alī al-Ṭabarī as accepting the textual authenticity of the Christian Bible in the same way as he accepts the textual authenticity of the Qur'ān would be to compare apples to oranges.** As we shall see, he makes use of biblical passages in such a way as to suggest that this book carries some level of authority. In fact, his use of biblical passages has led scholars such as Adang and Thomas to suggest that he does not question the textual authenticity of the Bible.53 Be that as it may, I would submit that his use of biblical citations in his argumentation need not imply that he outright accepts these texts as revealed in the same way as the Qur'ān. As I shall demonstrate, we have several reasons to believe that this is not the case—for instance, **how could he accept the authority of Gospel accounts that report Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, when the Qur'ān explicitly denies the crucifixion?54** Still, it remains that the present text cites the Bible in support of 'Alī al-Ṭabarī's view of the nature of God, while the *Kitāb al-Dīn wa al-Dawla* asserts the presence of proofs of Muhammad's prophecy in the Bible. Are we to believe, then, that these arguments are merely rhetorical, aimed exclusively at convincing a Christian audience? I believe that this conclusion is also false. While 'Alī al-Ṭabarī presents no decisive theory on the revealed status of the Bible, he nonetheless leaves hints as to how we might think about the efficacy of this book in directing us towards truth. As we shall see, he delineates these epistemic boundaries in the discourse of rationality and the Bible's relationship to the Qur'ān.
> …
>
> While I agree with Thomas's assessment that 'Alī al-Ṭabarī's accusation of corruption refers to the interpretation of scripture**, I would not take this so far as to conclude that he would consider the entire Christian Bible, as it exists in the form present to him, inerrant or unproblematic. In fact, we have several reasons to believe otherwise. For instance, he outright admits that the translators of his own Syriac edition of the Bible have corrupted the text by changing the term "gods" to "angels" in Psalm 82.92** Furthermore, as we have seen, he cites passages from Paul's letters and the hymn of Nestorius to support his argument. He also cites the Acts of the Apostles, wherein Simon Peter declares that Jesus was a *man* whom God raised from the dead.93 In other words, he ventures outside of the Torah, Psalms, and Gospel in support of his position. Even if he

> restricted himself to these three, the Gospel accounts that he relies on preserve reports that are at odds with the Qur'ānic account of the crucifixion. What I hope to illustrate here is this: **We cannot conclude from 'Alī al-Ṭabarī's mere citation of a text in support of his argument that he accepts the integrity of the book and its author.** He clearly reads the Bible through the lens of both a rationalist and Qur'ānic understanding of God and prophecy— God does not act irrationally, religious doctrines must be rational and logical, and prophets do not say what is contrary to reason. **Despite apparent contradictions between the Gospel accounts of the crucifixion and the Qur'ānic accounts of the event, he nonetheless references the Gospels. Despite Paul's problematic theology, 'Alī al-Ṭabarī nonetheless cites him.**
>
> **Therefore, we need not believe that 'Alī al-Ṭabarī considers the Christian Bible a revealed text on equal footing with the Qur'ān.** On the other hand, we need not go so far as to believe that his citations are merely a rhetorical tactic. Embarking on this project in order to protect against those who *ḥarrafa al-kalimāt* ("corrupt/falsify the words"), he posits a number of criteria—both rational and Qur'ānic in nature—by which one can read the Christian Bible, in order to extract its truth. These he summarizes in the twelve "neutral" criteria, to which any rational understand of God must adhere. It seems that rather than attempting to make a statement about the reliability of this text, 'Alī al-Ṭabarī focuses on establishing the criteria by which we can draw out its truth. Whereas the 318 who gathered at Nicaea corrupted the words in their interpretive methods, 'Alī al-Ṭabarī aims to demonstrate how we *really* ought to interpret the Bible: namely, according to reason. In this endeavor, we clearly see his investment in correcting his old tradition's understanding of their scriptures. Unlike the priests at Nicaea, who sought the approval of materialists and dualists, he implores his readers to avoid ridiculous, irrational doctrines. **Not only does he apply his rational criteria to the Torah, Gospel, and Psalms, but he also uses them to draw truth out of Paul's letters. It seems strange, then, to conclude that the reliability of the passages he cites derives primarily from their revealed status. Rather, these verses are selected and interpreted according to 'Alī al-Ṭabarī's *rational* criteria, which he expresses in Qur'ānic language.** (Jake Kildoo, *Reading Polemic as Confessional: 'Alī al-Ṭabarī's Critique of Christianity*, pp. 20; 33-35)

Martin Whittingham states:

> In mentioning the issue of corruption he indicates that this is brought about by translators and scribes. His reluctance to attack the Biblical text directly is understandable in a work basing its own plausibility on using the Bible. (Martin Whittingham, *A History of Muslim Views of the Bible*, p. 90)

Ryan Schaffner looked into Ibn Rabban's position in depth, and his comments are insightful:

> This interpretation by Beaumont does not take into account the entirety of al-Qāsim's or ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī's texts. Regarding the former, Beaumont ignores his

explicit and implicit arguments for textual corruption. Regarding the latter, Beaumont considers ʿAlī al- Ṭabarī's opinions of select proof-texts as evidence that he considers the entire text to be authentic.159 **This approach is common throughout the secondary scholarship, although a close reading of the texts will demonstrate the flaws in this hermeneutical method.**

…

Beaumont ignores ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī's and al-Qāsim's **process of filtering out the offending Gospel material that obscures this 'qur'ānic' Jesus.**

…

Rather, we can assume Muslims recognized that they could use quotations from Christian and Jewish scriptures for their own purposes, supplying their own interpretations in line with Islamic doctrines, **while not simultaneously assenting to the authenticity of the entire text.**

…

Thomas notes that a "more neutral attitude toward the Bible suggests that many Muslims were aware that it contained useful examples to support their arguments, even though the text as a whole may not be reliable."170 He considers ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī and al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm to typify this approach, although he notes the former is more concerned with reinterpretation in order to find Muḥammad foretold in the Scriptures, while the latter goes so far as to edit and rewrite the text.

….

ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī's view on the Bible is not simply that it is has been misinterpreted. To be sure, he does consider Christians to have misinterpreted many passages in the Bible, but it is incorrect to assume that he only advances that particular argument. Rather, his *Radd ʿalā al-naṣārā* is multi-faceted , and he does question the authenticity of the biblical text. This can be seen in three ways in his *Radd ʿalā al-naṣārā*. First, he explicitly states the Bible has been corrupted. Second, he distances a supposed real Gospel from what the Christians consider to be the Gospel. And third, he brings select passages from the Bible into alignment with the Qur'ān and Islamic principles. Each of these elements will be discussed in turn.

…

Examples of Islamicization of the Bible in ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī's text are less frequent than in al-Qāsim's al-Radd, although they do appear. For example, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī writes: "John said in the 17th chapter of his Gospel, 'Christ raised his eyes to the heavens and supplicated to God. And he said: "[for] eternal life, it is necessary for people that they know that you are God, the One, the True. And that you sent Jesus (Yasūʿ) Christ."'"958 **There are significant differences between the version ʿAlī**

> **al-Ṭabarī provides and the standard version that cannot be accounted for by paraphrasing or misremembering (if he is quoting from memory). Rather, there are clear theological edits made to the text.** In ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī's version, Jesus no longer refers to himself as "Son," God is no longer referred to as "Father," and 17:2, in which Jesus is said to have been given authority by God over humanity and to give eternal life, is removed entirely. **This type of editing reveals a very clear project by ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī to sanitize the text from Trinitarian and Incarnational accretions when necessary to bring it into alignment with qur'ānic and Islamic principles**. Because he selects verses for his purposes as needed, he is not required to make as many edits as al-Qāsim does. **Still, alterations to some of the verses he quotes testify to the fact that his view of the Bible is not simply that it has been misinterpreted but that the Qur'ān is the ultimate source of scriptural accuracy and only when the Bible conforms to it can it be considered authentic.** (Ryan Schaffner, *The Bible through a Qur'ānic Filter: Scripture Falsification (Taḥrīf) in 8th- and 9th-Century Muslim Disputational Literature*, pp. 63-68; 316-318)

Ibn Qutaybah (d. 276 A.H.)

Martin Whittingham states that Ibn Qutaybah clearly questioned the textual integrity of the New Testament:

> Ibn Qutayba never levels the charge of textual corruption against the Old Testament, though he twice uses the term taḥrīf to describe false interpretations by the People of the Book.[43] **However, he does mention textual corruption in his discussion of the New Testament.** One of these occasions is over the question of the name of Muhammad occurring in the Bible. He paraphrases Jesus' statement about John the Baptist in Matt 11:11–15, including Matthew's statement that "If you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come" (Matt 11:14, referring back to Malachi 4:5). He comments that the name of Muhammad is not actually missing since "It stipulated that Aḥmad would come, so they changed (ghayyarū) the name, just as God, may He be exalted, says: 'They alter words from their positions." (cf Q5:41).[44]
>
> Ibn Qutayba's **other New Testament discussion implying textual taḥrīf** concerns the Paraclete in John's Gospel. He comments that different verses about the Paraclete seem to differ, a puzzle explained by the fact that those who transmitted the Injīl from Jesus are numerous. He is nevertheless convinced that the Paraclete must be a reference to Muhammad.[45] (Martin Whittingham, *A History of Muslim Views of the Bible*, pp. 94-95)

Ryan Schaffner's comments on Ibn Qutaybah are pretty insightful:

> In Ibn Qutayba's *K. taʾwīl mukhtalif al-ḥadīth*, he quotes Matthew 5:33-37 in order to validate *ḥadīth* that some consider suspect. Prior to quoting these verses, which are consistent with the Christian formulation, he writes, "I read in the genuine

[*ṣaḥīḥ*] Gospel."971 By drawing attention to the fact that he read from a genuine [*ṣaḥīḥ*] Gospel, **Ibn Qutayba allows one to infer that he considered a falsified Gospel to exist.** Regarding this particular quotation, Isteero notes that, "The emphasis on the genuine Gospel likely reflects a Muslim suspicion at the time that the Christians had altered (*ḥarrafa*) their Biblical text. It is important for Ibn Qutayba, in quoting the Bible in his arguments, to assure his reader that it is the unaltered Bible."972 **That, however, is not evidence that Ibn Qutayba considered the entire text to be authentic, but that he considers the specific verses he quotes directly thereafter to be authentic. Furthermore, the need to mention that the Gospel he is quoting from is not altered is evidence that some considered the Gospel to have been altered. Had there only been arguments against Christian interpretations of the Gospel rather than against its textual authenticity there would have been no need for Ibn Qutayba to insist that this quotation comes from the genuine Gospel.**

…

It is a much simpler interpretation of such edits by Ibn Qutayba to consider them as consistent with a principle of qur'ānic primacy: Gospel quotations were filtered through the Qur'ān and altered as necessary to display a qur'ānic view of God's *tawḥīd.* **Ultimately, the Qur'ān was the criterion by which Ibn Qutayba evaluated the authenticity of the Gospel.**

…

These additions of honorifics to the text are minimally intrusive, but point to a perceived insufficiency in the original text and are further evidence that **Ibn Qutayba approaches the Bible as a text that can be added to or altered** as necessary in order to bring it into alignment with what is to be expected from Scripture.

…

Indeed, **the simple fact that Ibn Qutayba makes these alterations demonstrates that he considers it both incomplete and violable.** Furthermore, even if there are only limited instances in which his language suggests the text to have been altered, **his mention of a "genuine Gospel" is potentially further evidence that the authenticity of the Christian scriptures was being called into question at the time Ibn Qutayba was writing.** (Ryan Schaffner, *The Bible through a Qur'ānic Filter: Scripture Falsification (Taḥrīf) in 8th- and 9th-Century Muslim Disputational Literature*, pp. 322)

Al-Ya'qubi (d. end of 3rd century)

After the quoting the Gospel accounts on the event of the crucifixion, Al-Ya'qubi states:

هذا ما يقول أصحاب الإنجيل وهم يختلفون في كل المعاني، قال الله، عز وجل، ما قتلوه، وما صلبوه، ولكن شبه لهم، وإن الذين اختلفوا فيه لفي شك منه ما لهم به من علم إلا إتباع الظن، وما قتلوه يقينا بل رفعه الله إليه.

> This is what the Gospel authors have said, and they differ about everything. Allah said: " But they neither killed nor crucified him—it was only made to appear so.[1] Even those who argue for this ˹crucifixion˺ are in doubt. They have no knowledge whatsoever—only making assumptions. They certainly did not kill him. Rather, Allah raised him up to Himself. [Surah 4:157-158] (Al-Ya'qubi, *Tarikh al-Ya'qubi*, vol. 1, p. 30)

Al-Ya'qubi's perspective on the four gospels becomes evident when he explicitly highlights their contradictions with each other and the Qur'an.

Ibn Jarir al-Tabari (d. 310 A.H.)

Martin Whittingham expresses confusion confusion about Al-Tabari's position:

> However, elsewhere al-Ṭabarī **indicates something more than wrong interpretation.** On Q2:79 he notes that "some Jews wrote a book in line with their own interpretations, departing from what God sent down to his prophet Moses."[64] On Q3:78, a verse stating that the Jews twist their tongues (yalūna), **he includes a report stating that this means that the Jews invented something (ibtada'ū) and added to the text (yazīdūna).**[65] On Q5:13 he states that what the Jews wrote was "not what God sent down to their prophet."[66] Why he presents this diversity of views is uncertain, as is his own definitive position. Adang proposes that al-Ṭabarī considered that two versions of the Torah were in circulation. One was genuine, as restored by Ezra, according to 4Ezra, on which al-Ṭabarī relied.[67] A second version was a corrupted Torah written by rabbis, and which Jews mistook for the genuine text.[68] Nickel, taking a different approach, argues that "the obstinacy of the Jews was a reigning narrative theme in the mind of the exegetes."[69] This obstinacy relates primarily to Jewish rejection of knowledge of Muhammad. But since this obstinacy requires a deliberate rejection of knowledge already possessed, then the "reigning narrative theme" likewise requires a largely intact Torah to deliver this knowledge, and this theme therefore outweighs ideas about acts of textual corruption. **As often with al-Ṭabarī, it is perhaps impossible to discern his exact position on the topic of corruption;** indeed, perhaps he did not have an "exact" position, but was content to present a plurality of ideas. (Martin Whittingham, *A History of Muslim Views of the Bible*, p. 37)

There is no ambiguity regarding at-Tabari's stance. He explicitly states that the Jews fabricated their own false interpretations of the scriptures, deceiving people into believing they were revealed to Prophet Musa (peace be upon him). I provide citations for this in my article, which is readily accessible for all to read.

Al-Ghazali (d. 505 A.H.)

Martin Whittingham says:

> In assessing whether Pseudo-Ghazālī is in reality an advocate of the approach that regards the corruption of the Bible as ta_hrīf ma'nawī, this survey of his biblical interpretation should give pause for thought. While some of the examples might indicate a genuine acceptance of the veracity of the biblical text, such as the interpretation of the condition of Moses' hand, others point to a different conclusion. The careful selection from the Epistles of texts that support the author's viewpoint, the re-definition of terms, the use of a passage out of context, and the apparent denial of the crucifixion of Jesus, **all suggest that any apparent acceptance of the biblical text is a tactic rather than a sincere conviction. There is no explicit evidence in the text to indicate an acceptance that goes beyond convenience.** In short, Reynolds' comment that the work is 'thoroughly pragmatic', noted above, is supported. **Reliance on the Bible does not in this instance equate to accepting the reliability of the text.** (Martin Whittingham, *The value of taḥrīf ma'nawī (corrupt interpretation) as a category for analysing Muslim views of the Bible: evidence from Al-radd al-jamīl and Ibn Khaldūn*, pp. 214)

Gabriel Syed Reynolds states:

> In *al-Radd al-jamîl li-ilähiyyat' Isa bi-sarîh al-injîl* ("The Splendid Refutation to the Divinity of Jesus through a Clear Reading of the Gospel"), a work attributed to al-Ghazâlî (d. 505/1111), the author quotes liberally from the Christian Gospels to argue against Christian doctrine on Jesus. ^ However, if the author finds his religious thought confirmed in the Bible, he never turns to the Bible as a source for new or improved religious thought. **He does not, for example, accept the New Testament accounts of the crucifixion.** (Gabriel Syed Reynolds, *On the Qur'anic Accusation of Scriptural Falsification (tahrîf)and Christian Anti-Jewish Polemic*, pp. 189-190)

While inconclusive, Al-Ghazali made statements that could indicate his belief in the textual corruption of previous scriptures.

In his book *al-Mustasfa min 'Ilm al-Usul*, Al-Ghazali discusses the four conditions of Mutawatir ahadith. In the third condition, he states the following:

> الشرط الثالث أن يستوي طرفاه وواسطته في هذه الصفات وفي كمال العدد فإذا نقل الخلف عن السلف وتوالت الأعصار ولم تكن الشروط قائمة في كل عصر لم يحصل العلم بصدقهم لأن خبر أهل كل عصر خبر مستقل بنفسه فلا بد من شروط ولا جل ذلك **لم يحصل لنا العلم بصدق اليهود مع كثرتهم في نقلهم عن موسى** صلوات الله عليه تكذيب كل ناسخ لشريعته ولا بصدق الشيعة والعباسية والبكرية في نقل النص على إمامة علي أو العباس أو أبي بكر رضي الله عنهم وإن كثر عدد الناقلين في هذه الأعصار القريبة لأن بعض هذا وضعه الآحاد أولا ثم أفشوه ثم كثر الناقلون في عصره وبعده والشرط إنما حصل في بعض الأعصار فلم تستو فيه الأعصار ولذلك لم يحصل التصديق بخلاف وجود عيسى عليه السلام وتحديه بالنبوة ووجود أبي

بكر وعلي رضي الله عنهما وانتصابهما للإمامة فإن كل ذلك لما تساوت فيه الأطراف والواسطة حصل لنا علم ضروري لا نقدر على تشكيك أنفسنا فيه ونقدر على التشكيك فيما نقلوه عن موسى وعيسى عليهما السلام وفي نص الإمامة

Ahmad Zaki Mansur Hammad, in his English translation of al-Ghazali's book, pages 554-555, translates this as:

> The third condition is that the ends and intermediary [links of mutawdtir reports] must equally secure the previous conditions , 10 as well as the complete number [of reporters]. So, if the succeeding generations continued as time went on to report from the preceding ones, with the conditions not being fulfilled through out the time, then [certain] knowledge concerning their truthfulness would not have accrued because reports of the people of each generation are independent per se; therefore, each one must satisfy these conditions.
>
> **For this reason, [certain] knowledge did not accrue to us regarding the truthfulness of the Jews—in spite of their large number when reporting of Moses, blessings of Allah upon him, that he rejected any abrogation of his Shariah** nor regarding the truthfulness of the Shi'ites, the 'Abbasids, or the Bakriyya 11 when they reported a text concerning the imamate of 'Ali, or al-' Abbas, or Abu Bakr, [respectively], even though the number of transmitters has increased greatly in recent times. For some of these [reports] were first forged by individual reporters, circulated, and then, from that time onward, the [number of] reporters multiplied, while the conditions were satisfied only a few times.
>
> So, not all eras commonly share this; therefore, assent does not accrue. The contray holds true with reference to the existence of Jesus, /uLt\ and the challenge to his prophethood, or the existence of Abu Bakr and 'All, «ui '^j, and their rise to the imamate. Since these have the ends and the intermediary [as mutawdtir], then [certain] knowledge necessarily accrues to us such that we are unable to doubt ourselves about it. **But we are able to doubt what they reported from Moses and Jesus**, عليهما السلام or about the determination of the imamate, based on the texts [i.e. Qur'an or Sunna].

Al-Ghazali's words here are generic, particularly the second highlighted part. It's conceivable for someone to interpret them as referring to the extra-Biblical reports of Moses and Jesus. Technically, this interpretation is possible. However, without clear evidence, I believe we should interpret Al-Ghazali's words here in an unqualified sense.

In the same book, Al-Ghazali addresses a subject over which jurists have disagreed: the relevance of previous revelations for Muslims today, focusing on the Torah and the Injeel. Al-Ghazali examines whether Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) adhered to the religious instructions found in the Torah and Injeel, in addition to the Qur'an and Sunnah. Al-Ghazali asserts that he did not, presenting four arguments supporting his position.

him) when he dispatched Muadh b. Jabal to Yemen, instructing him to initially adjudicate based on the Book, followed by the Sunnah. Some scholars argue that "the Book" in this context encompasses the Qur'an, Torah, and Injeel. In response to this interpretation, Al-Ghazali states:

> قلنا إذا ذكر الكتاب والسنة لم يسبق إلى فهم المسلمين شيء سوى القرآن وكيف يفهم غيره ولم يعهد من معاذ قط تعلم **التوراة والإنجيل والعناية بتمييز المحرف عن غيره** كما عهد منه تعلم القرآن

> We say: If the "Book and Sunnah" are mentioned, nothing crosses the minds of Muslims except for the Qur'an. How could anything else be understood by it, and Muadh was not charged at all to learn the **Torah and Injeel and to take care in distinguishing what is *muharraf*** [from the *non-muharraf*], just as he was charged in learning the Qur'an.

There are two possible interpretations to this passage from Al-Ghazali. One interpretation suggests that Al-Ghazali implies that Muadh should have been tasked with distinguishing between the corrupted and uncorrupted elements within the Torah and Injeel themselves. Under this interpretation, Al-Ghazali would be alluding to textual corruption. Another interpretation, however, suggests that Al-Ghazali is stating that Muadh should have studied the Torah and Injeel and also developed the ability to differentiate between the interpretations of the Jews and Christians, separating the erroneous interpretations from the correct ones.

I believe the first interpretation presents a more straightforward reading of Al-Ghazali's words; however, it's essential to acknowledge that it doesn't serve as definitive evidence.

Continuing a few sentences later, Al-Ghazali presents his second argument:

> أنه لو كان متعبدا بها للزمه مراجعتها والبحث عنها…ولكان يرجع أولا إليها لا سيما أحكام هي ضرورة كل أمة فلا تخلو التوراة عنها **فإن لم يراجعها لاندراسها وتحريفها** فهذا يمنع التعبد **وإن كان ممكنا** فهذا يوجب البحث والتعلم ولم يراجع قط إلا في رجم اليهود ليعرفهم أن ذلك ليس مخالفا لدينهم

> If he [i.e. the Prophet] worshipped [God by abiding by the Torah], then he would have been obligated to use it as a reference and search for it…And he would have referred back to it especially on matters which are essential for each Ummah, for the Torah has no shortage [of such laws]. **If [the Prophet] did not refer back to it due its extinction and *tahreef***, then this would obstruct worship. **And if it were possible [to refer back to it],** then this would entail the obligation of searching for and learning it. And he never referred back to it, except in the case of the stoning of the Jews in order to demonstrate to them that this [i.e. punishment of stoning] does not contradict their religion.

In this passage, Al-Ghazali presents two scenarios: Scenario 1 suggests that the Prophet cannot refer back to the Torah due to its textual corruption and extinction. In contrast, Scenario 2 indicates that the Torah could be referred back to. One could argue that Al-Ghazali is considering the possibility of textual corruption because he knows that many Muslim scholars adhere to that view. However, this does not offer definitive proof either way.

Fakhr ud-Din ar-Razi (606 A.H.)

Ar-Razi's position has already been treated in a section of this article, as well as this article containing an additional key citation.

Ibn Khaldun (808 A.H.)

Some individuals have misinterpreted Ibn Khaldun's stance on this matter due to certain comments he made. However, Martin Whittingham sheds light on the nuanced perspective of Ibn Khaldun on the topic. He states:

> Ibn Khaldūn's remark that errors have entered the text through copyists' mistakes implies that the **Old Testament could be approached by Muslims in the light of what is now termed textual criticism.** Such criticism aims to establish the most reliable version of the text from comparisons of different manuscripts.4 However, Ibn Khaldūn's understanding of the exact extent of the *taḥrīf* is hard to assess on the basis of this passage, **since as his remarks unfold he appears to give increasing scope for error.** Here we begin to encounter, 'l'attitude finalement ambiguë d'un penseur célèbre [the ultimately ambiguous attitude of a famous thinker]' (Urvoy 2002, 165). Reflecting this ambiguity, Fischel states that Ibn Khaldūn represents the school of thought 'which charged the "Ahl al-Kitāb" not with textual falsification but only with a wrong interpretation' (Fischel 1967, 151). **Yet Fischel here uses 'wrong interpretation' in the sense that the Bible may contain textual errors, albeit arising from scribal carelessness rather than from deliberate attempts to deceive.** Here we encounter a key issue, namely the need to define more clearly where exactly the border lies between *taḥrīf lafẓ.ī* and *taḥrīf ma'nawī.* Which of these is the appropriate description for unintentional but real textual error? This question of what exactly is meant by *taḥrīf ma'nawī* becomes yet sharper as we turn to Ibn Khaldūn's treatment of the New Testament.
>
> The New Testament
>
> Ibn Khaldūn's view that 'custom prevents the people of the religions' from altering their scriptures has already been noted. In the Muqaddima, Ibn Khaldūn lists amongst the canonical books 'the Book of Clement which contains the Laws'. Concerning the canonical gospels, he states that Matthew wrote in Hebrew, Luke and Mark in Latin, and John wrote in Rome, perhaps implying a Latin text (Ibn Khaldūn 1858, 1:418–9; 1958, 1:476–8; see also Fischel 1958, **He then comments that, 'Not all of it is pure revelation (waḥy ṣirf) but (the gospels) have an admixture of the words of Jesus and of the Apostles' (Ibn Khaldūn 1858, 1:419; 1958, 1:477). It is unclear how this view of the gospels as a mixture of revelation and other material coheres with Ibn Khaldūn's view that the people of the two religions would not alter their scriptures. If the Injīl was originally sent down to Jesus as pristine revelation, as Muslims traditionally believe, and as Ibn Khaldūn would have believed on the basis of the Qur'an, by what process did the Christians end up possessing this mixture of revelation and other material if not by some form of *taḥrīf* ?** And if so, what kind of *taḥrīf*, textual or interpretation- related?

…

> Ibn Khaldūn's view of the gospels as a combination of revelation and ordinary words helps to shed light on how he approaches the issue of the crucifixion. **He presumably regards the Christian accounts that it was Jesus who was crucified as representing parts of the gospels that are not revelation.** The crucifixion therefore provides a test case demonstrating the difficulty of classifying Ibn Khaldūn's views of the New Testament. Which is the more reliable guide – the theoretical statement regarding the people of the religions not altering their scriptures, or his denial of Jesus' crucifixion? Was he even himself aware of the apparent contradiction? (see Black 2001, 168–9 on contradictions in Ibn Khaldūn's political ideas).
>
> …
>
> **It would appear that the main distinction that Ibn Khaldūn raises in approaching the biblical text is between deliberate or accidental corruption. In both cases, a form of textual corruption is involved.** (Martin Whittingham, *The value of taḥrīf ma'nawī (corrupt interpretation) as a category for analysing Muslim views of the Bible: evidence from Al-radd al-jamīl and Ibn Khaldūn*, pp. 217-220)

Conclusion

A common mistake made by some is to assume that because certain Muslim authors used specific Biblical passages for their da'wah efforts, it implies they accepted the entirety of the Bible as true. As Ryan Schaffner points out:

> As a result, early Muslim disputational literature provides further evidence that Muslims did not accept of the authenticity of the Bible entirely, although they considered particular verses as sound but misinterpreted by Christians. I argue that this particular method of selecting biblical quotations for specific apologetic purposes **is indicative of their disregard for the authenticity of the entirety.** And conversely, the assumption that considering select verses as authentic and simply misinterpreted characterizes Muslim polemicists' views on the Bible in its entirety transfers something that is only true of part (verses considered to be sound) improperly to the whole (the entirety of the Bible). (Ryan Schaffner, *The Bible through a Qur'ānic Filter: Scripture Falsification (Taḥrīf) in 8th- and 9th-Century Muslim Disputational Literature*, pp. 298)

I have deliberately strived to cite non-Muslim academics in this article to illustrate that an unbiased interpretation of these Islamic authors leads to the conclusion that they did indeed believe in the textual corruption of previous scriptures.